DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 325 EA 017 780

AUTHOR Lacattiva, Claire
TITLE The Use of Paraprofessionals as Part of the Teaching Team.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Chicago, IL, March 23-26, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Conflict Resolution; Elementary Secondary Education; *Teacher Aides; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Role; Team Teaching

ABSTRACT

The use of paraprofessionals on the teaching team has helped teachers maximize use of their professional and technical skills, but has also made it easier for several problems to develop. Teachers cite problems in authority and role confusion, personality conflicts, misalignment of instructional priorities, and task inefficiency. These problems can be alleviated if teachers, aides, and administrators make an effort. Teachers can help by planning ahead; providing for input from the paraprofessional before, during, and after the teaching day; providing for adequate training and supervision; using the paraprofessionals' specialized abilities; knowing the paraprofessionals' job descriptions; and respecting the paraprofessionals' professionalism. In their turn, the aides can establish their authority identity for students in a way that leaves the teacher's authority intact, familiarize themselves with the curriculum and its goals, understand the school's overall goals and their own relevant resources, and clarify their own personal and professional priorities. Administrators should assign paraprofessionals to teachers with compatibility in mind; provide inservice training and orientation opportunities; and provide for supervision and evaluation of the teaching team, recognition of paraprofessional contributions, and paraprofessional participation in staff conferences. (PGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED258325

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Claire Lacattiva

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS AS PART OF THE TEACHING TEAM

Claire Lacattiva

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Chicago, IL, March 22-26, 1985.

EA 017 780

THE USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS AS PART OF THE TEACHING TEAM

The use of paraprofessionals in our nation's schools has grown to major proportions and will continue to do so. This growth is inevitable in light of PL 94-142 which has served to exert a great deal of influence in spearheading the movement, and will continue to do so as mainstreaming increases and programs expand from pre-school through high school and college. Trained paraprofessionals are a very important addition to the instructional program, especially in special education and titled programs, where learner needs almost entirely demand a one-to-one ratio of pupil to teacher. While it is true that the use of "paras" as part of the teaching team has served many ends, most importantly to facilitate and maximize the use of professional and technical skills of the teacher, it has brought with it many problems. This paper will identify and explore specific areas of difficulty and offer suggestions to foster greater efficiency in their use.

One of the major difficulties arises because of the nature of the instructional format, that of team teaching. It is imperative, and the responsibility of the administrator, both in the organization and implementation of the team, to spend time on needs assessment, teacher-"para" selection and matching, procedures for evaluation, and follow-up training. The importance of the administrator's role cannot be overlooked. This will be discussed at a later point. While it is true that developing a firm structure base is essential for success, the instructional team of teacher and "para" is only as good as the members who comprise this team. Let us therefore look at these two components, firstly the teacher.

What problems do teachers face in working with "paras"? In an informal survey, it was found that problems did exist, however, despite this, teachers

felt they were glad to have paraprofessional assistance, and furthermore, that they were a definite asset to the classroom. Some of the problems cited included; authority and role confusion, personality differences, misalignment of instructional priorities, and task inefficiency. Any and all of which, contributed, it was felt, to fragmentation and varying degrees of weakness and inefficiency in the classroom. Not only because he/she is team leader, but because professional responsibility rests with him/her, the teacher is the critical catalyst in effecting change and necessary improvement. Furthermore my research and field interviews revealed that teachers were inadequately prepared in planning and organizing for the use of the paraprofessional in the classroom. This inadequacy, as I see it, is mainly a matter of readaptation of thinking and utilization of skills already in use. It was found that, where problems did exist, it was due to lack of specific teacher planning, supervision and direction of the paraprofessional, and his/her individual resources. What steps then, should teachers take to promote team integration and harmonious and maximum efficiency of the teaching team? It is suggested that teachers:

* Plan ahead for "para" responsibilities in both weekly and daily plans. This will result in more cohesive curriculum coverage and more efficient use of the resources and skills of the paraprofessional;
* Provide opportunity for "para" input both in pre-planning and post instruction evaluation. Mutual exchange of ideas will foster the idea of a dual base moving in cooperation towared shared goals. Energies will be better channeled in one direction rather than diluted.
* Set aside time each day for discussing the daily schedule and delegating responsibilities accordingly. Specificity here, will serve to establish accountability as well as lessen role confusion.

*Provide for organizing informal supervision and evaluation and necessary training, when and where needed. Remember - shared work space, shared time, shared skills! The teacher as a professionally trained person must be realistic with regard to the technical training of the "para", which of course can run anywhere from no high school to college trained without credentials. In this regard he/she should do his/her own assessment and accept his/her responsibility for in-service training.

*Be informed of the specialized training or personal resources the "para" has to offer and use appropriately. The effective use of instructional materials and resources is important in good teaching and, it is no less true here, where the "para" may be viewed as a human resource. In addition, it will serve to motivate, since many "paras" voiced annoyance at being misused, in addition to being under utilized... "wasting my time" or over used..."being taked advantage of". Avoidance of these behaviors will raise "para" morale and serve to increase motivation, job energy and productivity.

*Be familiar with the employment guidelines and job description for paid "paras". This ties in with appropriate use.

*Know and respect your professional boundaries. There must be mutual respect and caring, with the human factor given importance at all times. Good interpersonal relations between teacher and "para" is critical to efficiency of instruction and the well-being of the child, who is the one who frequently gets caught in the middle of the personality clash and suffers most.

While this is not an all inclusive list of possible problem areas and/or teacher-"para" behaviors, it represents some of the more critical concerns that evolved from my interviews.

Any and all of the suggested approaches and teacher effort is necessarily dependent upon the understanding and cooperation of the paraprofessional as well. It is necessary to look at the role the paraprofessional plays in improving the efficiency of the teaching team. What can a "para" do to provide maximum service to pupils and at the same time derive professional benefits from the job? After close study of the problems and reactions of the paraprofessionals surveyed, the following suggestions evolve as significant. It is suggested that "paras":

*Establish their authority identity in such a way as not to dilute that of the teacher. Divisiveness causes a split in the child, confusion, and very often manipulation by the child of the adults in question. In addition to interference of instruction, a general anxiety and hostility is generated in the classroom environment which can only be counter productive to all concerned.

STRIVE TO DEVELOP A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL SELF CONCEPT

*Familiarize themselves with curriculum so that they are aware of the instructional goals as well as personal growth- work study and social-living goals to be met. Many, if not the majority of "paras", come with parenting skills which are of great value, especially when working with special learners whose ego development and self-concept is weak. When it came to the question of interacting with pupils, teachers felt "paras" nurture too much to the point of instructional interference, while "paras", in turn, felt teachers were too concerned with getting information across. In my own supervision, I have witnesses both extremes and can attest to the validity of both perceptions. I, myself, would like to see a better balance.

STRIVE TO DEVELOP BETTER BALANCED TEACHER - PARENT ROLE

*Understand the over-all educational as well as specific instructional goals of the school as well as the specific class placement. Assess personal resources and look positively for professional growth offered on the job.

STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND ASSESS PERSONAL RESOURCES

*Be clear in your own mind what you want to get, what you're willing to give, and how you intend to arrive at your own career goals.

STRIVE TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRIORITIES

This is but a partial listing of suggestions in answer to some of the problems which arose in my study.

In conclusion, any discussion of this topic would not be complete without some consideration given to the administrator and his/her impact. The efficiency of the paraprofessional is strongly influenced by the school's program and its machinery of operations. Since the tone of the school and staff morale is significantly effected by the attitudes and behaviors of the administrator, the acceptance and absorption of the "para" into the professional mainstream is dependent upon him/her. Following are some suggestions for administrators:

*In assigning "paras" to a team, be aware of the importance of matching personalities that will be compatible.

*Provide in-service training opportunities for both teacher and "para". ie. Observations, workshops, visiting consultants, etc.

*Provide for on-going scheduled supervision and evaluation sessions for both teachers, and especially those "paras" on a career ladder.

*Establish a day, an award or plan an event that focuses on the importance of "paras" and gives special recognition as is the case with teachers, secretaries, etc. in the school.

*Provide for orientation, acquainting "paras" with school policies and procedure.

*Include "paras" in the monthly professional staff conference where and when feasible.

Trained paraprofessionals are an important addition to the educational team. In addition to providing teachers with more time for instruction, giving more opportunities for learners in need of special attention, relieving administrators facing personnel shortages, and assisting other school professionals in their duties, the training paraprofessionals receive permits their development of skills which can be used to meet the needs of the community and society as well. Herein lies the rationale for establishing paraprofessionalism as an educational priority.